

Fighting climate change...

...needs real system change!

Extinction Rebellion has managed to organise an impressive number of people into a civil disobedience movement. They have managed to shut down and occupy significant parts of London including numerous major road junctions over the past week. They have many admirable principles such as “breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation” and “creating a world that is fit for generations to come”. However is civil disobedience really the best method for getting action to be taken on climate change?



The aim of Extinction Rebellion’s civil disobedience campaign is to attempt to cause enough disruption so that the State meets their demands to bring back order – as appearing to have order and control is important for the State. It is quite possible that the State will partially concede to a couple of the demands of extinction rebellion – however what isn’t going to happen is a significant system change. This is an issue because the root cause of climate change is capitalism with its requirement for constant growth. The people in the corridors of power are simply too vested in capitalism to allow something better to replace it.

Because climate change is a product of capitalism, our aim must not be to get concessions from the system but to replace it. The police have still arrested over 1000 people at the XR protests. Despite such vast numbers of arrests, which was actually the intention of XR, the State rarely capitulates in the face of civil disobedience on the part of tiny mobilised minorities, even highly committed ones like XR. Generalised mass mobilisations, however, based upon civil disobedience, such as the anti- Poll Tax campaign with widespread non-payment, community mobilisation and anti-Poll tax riot in London in 1990, were relatively successful.

The idea that the police are potentially our friends, which is spread around by XR, is just wrong. Many people were abused by the police (especially people who are part of a minority) with people being dragged into cells and stripped searched by force or threatened with broken bones. The nice police officers you might come across when you’re protesting “nicely” pretend to be friendly to get information and to get into peoples’ heads, but they will turn into brutes the moment they are ordered to. This

Save the planet... smash capitalism!

idea that the police are possible allies is harmful to everyone who has been abused or has suffered systematic abuse from the police as it marginalises their experiences.

And despite the best efforts of thousands of people for over a week, how many police officers have thrown their badges on the floor and refused to serve a regime which throws people in cells for protesting what is going to kill billions of people? It is obvious that the police are not going to change sides and help shut down all the different things which are poisoning the planet. Rather, as was shown as the week drew on, they will continue to protect them. Furthermore, it is only a matter of time before the police start using more heavy-handed methods (the bully cannot let people stand up to him and get away with it!). Therefore, our attempts cannot be restricted to just civil disobedience as it is not capable of dismantling the capitalist system. Instead of imploring the State to stop doing evil things, we must stop these evils ourselves using a wide range of tactics which allow us to attack what is destroying the planet.

But we must remember, because any meaningful response to climate change requires system change, the manner in which we change the system is incredibly important too. If we just have a few thousand people leading the charge we risk making a society which doesn’t represent the needs of everyone – and risks replacing our current form of oppression with a new one. We need to have a mass, global movement from the entire populace to ensure the new system is a good system.

So what’s the alternative? Imagine if the thousands of protestors in London, instead of peacefully occupying public spaces started organising with the public to achieve mass action against things like fossil fuel plants (as in industries?) and the like. Instead of us asking those powerful people who are benefiting from the destruction of the environment to stop destroying the planet – we could fight to just stop them whether or not they agree to do this! Ultimately though, this will mean a revolution to get rid of capitalism and replace it with a society based on need not profit and exists in harmony with nature.

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